

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSM-03 HA-05 MCT-01 SY-05 AID-05
COME-00 ACDA-12 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 /096 W
-----086600 231539Z /46

R 231041Z MAY 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8124
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
USINT BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 2959

E.O. 11652: XGDS-4
TAGS: PINT, SY
SUBJECT: ALAWITE OFFICER SLAIN AMIDST CONTINUING INCIDENTS OF
ANTI-REGIME VIOLENCE

REF: DAMASCUS 2836

1. EMBASSY HAS RECEIVED SEVERAL RELIABLE REPORTS THAT
ALAWITE WARRANT OFFICER WAS SLAIN BY GUNFIRE OUTSIDE
HIS HOME IN ALEPPO ON WEDNESDAY, MAY 17. ACCORDING TO
THESE REPORTS, THIS MAN HAD RESPONSIBILITY FOR TELEPHONE
INTERCEPTS, A POSITION HE HAD OCCUPIED FOR A LONG TIME,
AND WHICH HE ALLEGEDLY USED TO ENRICH HIMSELF. A SEPARATE
SOURCE REPORTED THAT AN AIDE TO DAMASCUS INTEL CHIEF MUHAMMAD
NASSIF CLAIMED THE VICTIM HAD IMPORTANT INTELLIGENCE
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RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE ALEPPO AREA. THE RAPIDITY WITH
WHICH THE STORY CIRCULATED AROUND DAMASCUS SUGGESTS THAT
THE MAN KILLED WAS WELL KNOWN IN ALEPPO AND/OR THAT A
NUMBER OF PEOPLE WITNESSED THE KILLING. MURDER WAS ALLEGEDLY
TIMED TO COINCIDE WITH VISIT OF MININT DABBAGH TO ALEPPO.

2. A SECOND ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT APPARENTLY ALSO OCCURRED

SEVERAL DAYS LATER IN ALEPPO ON JABER AL-ALI, AN ALAWITE AND THE FATHER OF IBRAHIM AL-ALI, COMMANDER OF THE PEOPLE'S ARMY. FEW DETAILS ARE KNOWN ABOUT THIS ATTEMPT BUT AL-ALI REPORTEDLY SURVIVED. WE ARE TOLD THAT JABER AL-ALI WAS NOT LIKED IN ALEPPO BECAUSE HE WAS IDENTIFIED WITH THE UNPOPULAR UNIONIST REGIME WHICH RULED THE COUNTRY FROM 1958-61 AND WAS SUSPECTED OF HAVING ELIMINATED SEVERAL REGIME OPPONENTS AT THAT TIME. HE ALSO OPPOSED THE ANTI-NASSER SECESSIONIST COUP.

3. ON SUNDAY EVENING, MAY 21, A SUSPICIOUS FIRE BADLY DAMAGED A BUILDING HOUSING THE OFFICES OF A GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPANY IN DAMASCUS. POLICE RUSHED TO AN ADJACENT STORE REPORTEDLY OWNED BY THE SAME COMPANY, PRESUMABLY TO PREVENT ARSON IF THAT, INDEED, WAS THE CAUSE. WE ARE CURRENTLY ATTEMPTING TO PIN DOWN RUMOR THAT SEVERAL GOVERNMENT-OWNED COMPANIES WERE FIREBOMBED ON THE SAME EVENING.

4. THESE INCIDENTS FOLLOW ON THE HEELS OF AN ALMOST SUCCESSFUL ATTACK AGAINST THE MINISTER OF TRANSPORTATION AND THE ABDUCTION OF A REGIONAL COMMAND MEMBER'S DAUGHTER (SEE REFTTEL). NO ONE HAS AS YET BEEN BROUGHT TO TRIAL FOR THESE INCIDENTS OR THE MURDERS OF PROMINENT ALAWITE RELATIVES OF THE PRESIDENT, INCLUDING DRS. ALI ABD ALI, YUSSEF AL-YUSSEF, AND IBRAHIM NA'AMAH, ALTHOUGH SYRIAN DRAGNETS HAVE RESULTED IN THE ARRESTS OF SCORES OF SYRIANS. CONFIDENTIAL

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5. COMMENT: ALEPPO CONTINUES TO PROVE AN INHOSPITABLE ENVIRONMENT FOR ALAWITES, SECOND ONLY TO HAMA. WE ARE TOLD THAT THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND OTHER CONSERVATIVE MUSLIM ELEMENTS ARE WELL-ORGANIZED THERE, PERHAPS AS A REACTION AGAINST THE PRESENCE OF A LARGE AND INFLUENTIAL CHRISTIAN MINORITY IN THE CITY. CONTINUING RASH OF SERIOUS ANTI-REGIME INCIDENTS AND APPARENT INABILITY OF SYRIAN SECURITY SERVICES TO ARREST THOSE RESPONSIBLE IS A MAJOR EMBARRASSMENT TO THE REGIME. THIS UNCHECKED SERIES OF ASSASSINATIONS HAS BEEN WELCOMED WITH MALICIOUS GLEE BY DISAFFECTED SUNNI ELEMENTS AND MAY ENCOURAGE ACTION BY OTHER REGIME OPPONENTS WHO, HERETOFORE, HAVE BEEN INTIMIDATED BY THE PERCEIVED PERVASIVENESS OF SYRIAN SECURITY APPARATUS FROM ORGANIZING AGAINST THE REGIME. PELLETTREAU

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